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Migration Statistics

Labour migration in the Commonwealth of Independent States region: challenges of and approaches to improving statistical information

Prepared by the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Summary

The paper proposes a road map to addressing the issue of migration statistics' quality and reliability, with a particular focus on labour migration. Particular attention is paid to the needs of unification of legal interpretation regarding migrants and their classification by staus, needs in integrated methodology of migrants' registration and methods of data collection from administrative sources and through population censuses and special thematic surveys on migration issues.

The paper is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on migration statistics.

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I. Introduction

1. In today's world international migration is an important condition for development of both migrant-receiving and migrant-donor countries. The main reasons for improving the measurement of international migration as a top priority include the following: globalisation, further development of the world labour market, population ageing in most developed countries, large cross border money transfers by migrants to their families, high level of youth unemployment in several developing economies, and newly emerging social challenges due to significant numbers of immigrants to the migrant-receiving countries.

2. International labour migration is an important factor that influences the relationships between the most developed countries (labour migrant-recipients) and developing economies (labour migrant-donors). Relatively "excessive" population of labour migrant-donor countries gains additional opportunities to get an access to labour markets in other countries, new skills, knowledge, and professions. This results in some progress in building the capacities of developing countries to address the issues of high unemployment rates and poverty.

3. In developed countries national labour markets are transforming and the need for migration has increased due to decreasing number of population, increasing ageing, growing amount of non-working population and the number of people that choose a profession requiring a high level of education. These developments make the presence of foreign labor an important element of future economic development of countries receiving migrants.

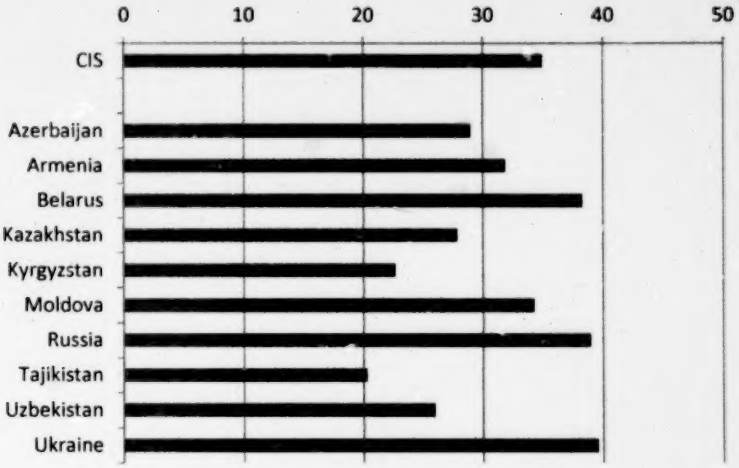
4. The fall of the Soviet Union changed the migration situation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region. Internal migration flows inside the former Soviet Union turned at once into international migration, and the system of recording labour migration needed to be changed. The populations of newly established countries such as Azerbaijan, Moldova, and those of Central Asia – regions which in earlier were characterized by low mobility – started to actively participate in migration.

5. During the past decade, permanent residence in the CIS region has changed by about 300-500 thousand people each year, and short-term migration has amounted to several millions according to experts. Migration within the CIS region accounts for almost 85 per cent of all migration in the countries. Thus, the level of migration between the CIS countries remains high and probably the current migration patterns will persist.

6. High migration within the CIS region is facilitated by the common history and geographic proximity of countries, visa-free border crossings and Russian language that remains the main means of communication. In addition, the relatively similar system of vocational education promotes labour migration. Vector migration in CIS countries will depend on the pace of economic development and demographic trends, including those associated with the shrinking working population and the ageing of the population, primarily in the European part of the CIS region.

7. In accordance with UN standards, the population of Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine can be considered old as the proportion of persons aged 65 years and older exceeds 7 per cent. The populations of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are on the verge of being aged since the corresponding proportion is 4-7 per cent of the total population. The populations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, on the other hand, are considered to be young with less than 4 per cent of the total population being older than 65 years. (See figure 1.)

Figure 1
Median age of the population of the CIS countries, in years



II. Challenges with migration statistics

8. The challenge of accuracy of data on short-and long-term migration is common for all CIS countries, regardless of whether they are receiving or sending migrants.

9. The statistical authorities rely primarily on national data in analysing the migration situation and adopting appropriate policies. However, to get a correct understanding they would need cross-country comparisons of data, comparative analyses of national legislations and information on the definitions and methodologies applied both in donor and recipient countries.

10. Labour migration dominates the total flows of short-term and long-term migration. The accuracy of registering labour migration is one of the most important tasks for both donor and recipient countries. Due to the number of non-registered migrants, labour migration is difficult to measure. This is why the reasons of migration and the use of foreign labour remain largely outside administrative and statistical measurement.

11. A characteristic feature of labour migration in CIS countries is that there are a significant number of migrants with uncertain status or who are working without permits.

12. In recent times, CIS countries have made progress in determining the volume and characteristics of labour migration. The topic of migration has been included in the programs for population and housing censuses. However, using census data to analyse migration in the whole CIS region is quite difficult since it would require access to the data of the partner countries. The data would have to be methodologically comparable and cover the same time periods. The time lag between the 2010 round of censuses was five years among the CIS countries (2009 to 2014). At the same time, Ukraine and Uzbekistan are likely to miss the current round of census surveys.

13. Some special surveys have been created to study labour migration in a number of CIS countries.

Table 1
List of thematic and modular surveys on labour migration (according to national statistical offices)

Country	Name of survey	Year conducted and periodicity
Armenia	Migration survey with a focus on money transfers (remittances); Survey of internal and external migration in Armenia; Survey of labour migration in Armenia	2006 2007 2009
Kyrgyzstan	Sample survey of labour migration	2010
Moldova	Migration of the labour force (module for Labour Force Survey); Labour force migration	2008 2012
Russia	Use of migrant labour	From 2014, once in 5 years
Tajikistan	Effects of migration and remittances on the welfare and poverty of households in Tajikistan	2010
Ukraine	Ukrainian External Labour Migration; Migration of the labour forces (a module of the Labour Force Survey)	2008 2012

14. International organizations, especially the International Labour Organization (ILO) has provided methodological and organizational support for carrying out these surveys. In these surveys questions are asked about absent household members, and persons who have returned after working abroad are interviewed.

15. Administrative data are an important source of information on migration (as part of the immigration and border services, law enforcement bodies and other bodies dealing with migration). Currently, work is underway for the development of automated registration systems. For example, in the Russian Federation a central register of foreign citizens has been developed and implemented, which provides information describing various aspects of labour migration.

16. However, despite ongoing work of CIS countries to improve migration statistics and to establish an accounting of migrants in the CIS region, there are serious problems of quality and comparability of national data at the international level.

17. In many CIS countries significant discrepancies exist between the outward flows of long-term migrants from one country and arrivals in another. These differences lead to a statistical paradox, when both of the partner countries do not lose, but win in the migration exchange, and have, thus, positive migration balances. At least four pairs of CIS countries can be identified which consistently show mutual positive migration balance. These discrepancies are seen in the national data on departures from the donor country that do not take into account the data of the recipient country on long-term migrants arriving from the donor country in question. These discrepancies affect the current assessment of the country's population, leading to distortions in the description of demographic processes.

18. The current ongoing reporting on the volumes of labour migration also does not allow comparing information between partner states. Data on the number of migrant workers – foreign workers employed in the CIS economies – are based on the issuance of work permits and/or patents. The problem with such reports is that one person can have two work permits (or permit and patent) or work for several employers. Thus, it is necessary to develop a better functioning system to account for the documents permitting or confirming employment of foreigners. It would be important to be able to analyse the presence of foreigners in the labour market accurately.

19. One of the core reasons for poor comparability of migration flows are the differences in the methods of accounting for migration, including differences in definitions of accounting units, primary accounting documents (passport, identity card, residence permit, invitation, work permit, permission to engage in employment, patents, etc.) and different procedures for registration at the point of arrival.

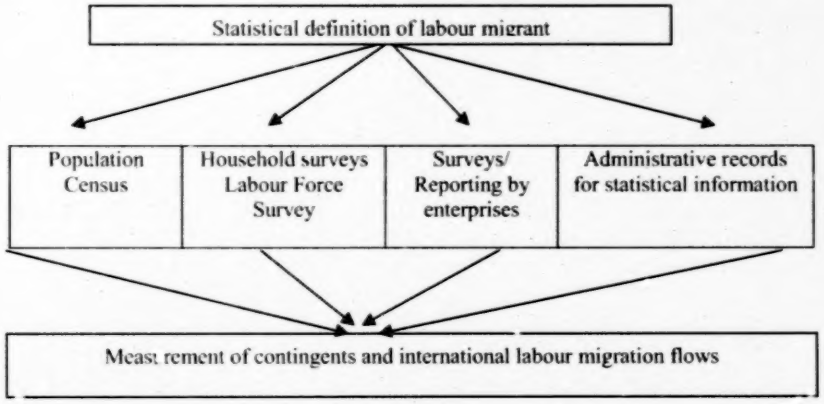
III. Towards improved harmonisation of migration statistics

20. The lack of comparability becomes apparent in inter-country comparisons. It is very important to actively exchange information between countries in order to improve the quality of migration statistics. The countries need to analyse mutual migration flows and develop harmonized approaches to adjusting, where necessary, the national data.

21. In addition, the methodology of data collection needs to be harmonized along with the definitions of migrant workers as statistical observation units. Otherwise, it will be difficult to compare the information gathered in the origin and destination countries, or even just in one country when using different accounting systems.

22. At the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, held in October 2013, the need to develop such a definition was highlighted. The Conference decision (Resolution IV) stipulated that consultations will need to be conducted in order to define and agree on standards for labour migration statistics. This definition should be unified and "integrated" into all kinds of statistical observations (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Harmonising the statistical definition of labour migrants in the statistical system


Statistical definition of labour migrant
Population Census
Household surveys Labour Force Survey
Surveys/ Reporting by enterprises
Administrative records for statistical information
Measurement of contingents and international labour migration flows

23. The purpose of harmonization of migration statistics can simplistically be formulated as follows: Every migrant - long-term or short-term - should be counted twice: once as an emigrant from the country of his origin and the second time as an immigrant arriving in the destination country. In this case, countries - partners in the migration exchange will receive the mirror migration statistics. However, in practice, realizing such an ideal scheme is problematic in its entirety, and there are no examples of this in practice. However, to take steps towards improving the quality of migration statistics remains possible.

24. CIS regulatory documents stipulate the formation of a common labour market in the CIS countries. For these purposes, the following actions are considered: regularizing

migration processes to serve the needs of the CIS countries; establishing a monitoring and rapid exchange of information on the state of national labour markets and the availability of vacancies. Currently, the highest governing bodies of the CIS have been tasked with the harmonization of migration statistics in the CIS countries.

25. With this regard it should be considered that the creation of economic or political associations of countries often leads to the removal of barriers to promote the movement of migrants or workers, which is then reflected in statistics. Measures taken towards having no need to obtain a work permit, creating more liberal rules of residence registration or removing border crossing points between partner countries, might lead to the exclusion of certain categories of migrants from registrations and to a significant reduction in the volume of recorded migration. Such problems are now faced by the countries participating in the Common Economic Space and the Union State of Russia-Belarus. Despite the advantages that come from interstate unions, reporting on migration does not lose its relevance and requires new approaches.

26. Government decisions are needed for reaching agreement on the ways and methods of compiling statistics on migration. For this, it is important that proposals be developed that are most "fitting" for the current migration legislation of each country.

IV. Development of migration statistics and a road map

27. In recent years, international organizations (ILO, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and World Bank) have been involved in projects in the CIS countries in which some surveys were conducted with the aim of improving migration statistics. As a result, data sources have been refined, classifications have been introduced, and recommendations for improvement were given. This is an important step towards further harmonization of migration statistics and towards improving international comparability.

28. Currently, a joint project of UNECE, the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (Rosstat) and the Interstate Statiatical Committee of the CIS (CIS-STAT) is being implemented on conducting a census of the population and statistics on migration within the CIS region. This project should be a platform for further discussion of the challenges and ways to improve the quality of migration statistics in the CIS countries.

29. The active support provided by international organizations to CIS countries on improving migration statistics have enhanced the capacity of national statistical offices and organizations responsible for registering migration in the region. A number of activities were carried out either in individual countries or groups of countries in the region taking into account their specific challenges. Next step, however, should be to strengthen the coordination of the activities – in particular, between IOM and ILO – for a comprehensive improvement of migration statistics, especially labour migration.

30. For its part CIS-STAT, together with the national statistical offices and agencies engaged in migration registration in countries, is preparing a draft roadmap for improving migration statistics in the CIS region on the basis of the studies conducted so far. The roadmap suggests the following main directions of work:

(a) With the aim of developing a common approach in the CIS countries for the definition and classification of migrants, it is proposed to adopt a consistent definition of "migrant workers", which will be the statistical observation unit. It is proposed that this work will be coordinated with ILO;

(b) In order to improve information exchange, the common formats for the data presented on foreign workers employed in a country's economy should be agreed: one of the ways to deal with reporting on the foreign workforce, and its international comparability may be a shift from reporting on issued work permits (patents) to accounting of the number of foreign workers who have received such permits. The solution to this problem is complex because it will require some changes in the organization of registering migrants, primarily in the receiving countries. It is proposed to look into the possibility of using "mirror" statistics by partner countries in migration exchange to adjust national data on migration flows and population estimates. Developments in this area shall be carried out in collaboration with IOM and ILO;

(c) Given the importance of the population census as the primary data resource on population, a coherent module of questions related to migration shall be included in the program of the national census round in 2020, and harmonization of categories describing the population in order to ensure the comparability of information. The greatest effect of such harmonization can be achieved only when the dates for the censuses in all CIS countries are as close together as possible. This initiative will be implemented in collaboration with UNECE in the overall preparation for the 2020 round of population census in the UNECE region.

31. In order to progress with the draft proposals outlined in the roadmap, a group of experts will be set up with representatives from national statistical offices and departments involved in conducting migration reporting along with experts from the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly.

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